

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 03598

E.O. 11652:GDS
TAGS: OVIP (CHURCH, FRANK)
SUBJECT: WRAP-UP OF MARCH 24-28 VISIT OF SENATOR AND
MRS. CHURCH TO BASQUE COUNTRY AND MADRID

1. SUMMARY: SENATOR AND MRS. CHURCH WERE RECEIVED WITH CONSIDERABLE ENTHUSIASM DURING THEIR 3-DAY STAY IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY. WHILE THERE, THE SENATOR MET WITH MANY BASQUE LEADERS, INCLUDING BASQUE GENERAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT RAMON RUBIAL AND PNV LUMINARY JUAN AJURIAGUERRA, OBSERVED BASQUE NATIONAL DAY (ABERRI EGUNA) FESTIVITIES IN BILBAO, AND CROSSED INTO FRANCE TO CALL ON BASQUE GOVT-IN-EXILE PRESIDENT LEIZAOLA. IN MADRID, THE SENATOR MET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA, LUNCHEONED WITH 15 POLITICAL AND GOVT FIGURES, CALLED ON SENATE PRESIDENT FONTAN, AND CAPPED HIS STAY WITH A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL AUDIENCE WITH THE KING. SENATOR CHURCH'S VISIT WAS USEFUL IN DEMONSTRATING US SUPPORT FOR SPANISH DEMOCRACY AND IN BROADENING HIS OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPANISH POLITICAL SCENE. END SUMMARY.

2. SENATOR AND MRS. CHURCH AND STAFFER IRA NORDLICHT VISITED THE BASQUE COUNTRY MARCH 24-26 AT THE INVITATION OF THE EUZKADI-USA CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM, OF WHICH THE SENATOR IS A US CO-PRESIDENT. THEIR ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION AT THE BILBAO AIRPORT, WHERE THEY WERE MET BY
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A LARGE BASQUE NATIONALIST PARTY (PNV) CONTINGENT, A TROUPE OF COSTUMED BASQUE DANCERS, AND AMCONSUL BILBAO, SET THE TONE FOR THEIR 3-DAY STAY IN "VASCONGADAS."

-- AT A KICK-OFF LUNCHEON MARCH 24, PNV LEADERS AJURIAGUERRA AND ARZALLUZ GAVE SPEECHES OF WELCOME, WITH ARZALLUZ RECALLING BASQUE COOPERATION WITH US

INTELLIGENCE DURING WW II, AND THE USG'S FAILURE TO BACK THE BASQUE'S "STRUGGLE AGAINST FRANCO'S OPPRESSION." SENATOR CHURCH RESPONDED THAT HE HAD SPOKEN OUT IN BEHALF OF THE BASQUES ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING THE FRANCO REGIME, ALBEIT WITH LITTLE SUCCESS, AND HE WISHED THE BASQUES SUCCESS IN THEIR QUEST FOR AUTONOMY.

-- MARCH 25 BEGAN WITH A WELL-COVERED PRESS CONFERENCE DURING WHICH THE SENATOR STATED, INTER ALIA, THAT HE HOPED TO DISCUSS WITH SUAREZ AND THE KING THE "LEGITIMATE ASPIRATIONS" OF THE BASQUES. THE SENATOR AND HIS PARTY THEN TRAVELED TO THE BASQUE FISHING PORT OF BERMEO AND GUERNICA, WHERE THEY WERE MET BY LARGE GROUPS OF WELL-WISHERS. THEY THEN RETURNED TO BILBAO, WHERE FIVE PNV LEADERS, INCLUDING PARLIAMENTARIANS AJURIAGUERRA, ARZALLUZ AND UNZUETA, HELD A SERIOUS DISCUSSION WITH THE SENATOR ON THE PNV'S AUTONOMY GOALS (AMCONSUL BILBAO'S MEMCON BEING POUCHED). SENATOR CHURCH THEN MET WITH BASQUE GENERAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT RAMON RUBIAL (ALSO PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIALIST PSOE) AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL.

-- ON MARCH 26, SENATOR AND MRS. CHURCH OBSERVED THE ORDERLY BASQUE NATIONAL DAY (ABERRI EGUNA) PARADE IN BILBAO FROM THE BALCONY OF A PNV FAMILY'S APARTMENT. LARGE NUMBERS OF PNV MARCHERS -- THE BULK OF THE PARADE --
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CHEERED AND WAVED AT THE CHURCHES, WHO RETURNED THEIR ENTHUSIASTIC GREETINGS. IN THE PART OF THE PARADE POPULATED BY "ABERTZALE" (BASQUE NATIONALIST) LEFTISTS, THERE WERE NUMEROUS PRD-INDEPENDENCE BANNERS AND CONTINUING CHANTS CALLING FOR BASQUE INDEPENDENCE. FOLLOWING THE PARADE, SENATOR AND MRS. CHURCH DEPARTED FOR SAN JUAN DE LUZ, FRANCE, TO SEE BASQUE GOVT-IN-EXILE PRESIDENT LEIZAOLA, WHOM THEY HAD MET SOME YEARS AGO IN CARACAS. THEY THEN RETURNED TO SPAIN FOR A DINNER WITH PNV FIGURES IN SAN SEBASTIAN.

3. SENATOR CHURCH AND HIS PARTY THEN FLEW TO MADRID ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 27, FOR A 2-DAY STAY BEFORE CONTINUING ON TO MARBELLA. THE SENATOR, ACCOMPANIED BY THE AMBASSADOR (AS ON ALL OF HIS MADRID CALLS), WENT FIRST TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR A SCHEDULED CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA. THE FOREIGN MINISTER, IN A RARE DISPLAY OF BAD POLITICAL JUDGMENT (WHICH HAS EARNED HIM IRRITATION IN HIGHER GOVERNMENT CIRCLES), DECLINED TO RECEIVE THE SENATOR. AFTER SOME DELAY, THE SENATOR WAS RECEIVED BY DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER MIGUEL SOLANO FOR A BRIEF AND NON-SUBSTANTIVE EXCHANGE.

AS THE RESULT OF EXTENDED PHONE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE AMBASSADOR AND OREJA IN WHICH THE AMBASSADOR FRANKLY TOLD OREJA THAT HE HAD MADE A SERIOUS ERROR AND IN WHICH THE MINISTER PROVIDED SEVERAL AND CONTRADICTIONARY REASONS

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FOR HIS ACTION, THE MEETING WAS RE-SET FOR MARCH 28. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT A SCHEDULED CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER ON MARCH 28 HAD BEEN SUDDENLY CANCELLED AS A RESULT OF OREJA'S INTERFERENCE. THE AMBASSADOR HAS LEARNED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER IS FURIOUS OVER THIS, AS HE HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED ON THE CANCELLATION.

4. AFTER THE FALSE START AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, SENATOR CHURCH PAID A COURTESY CALL ON AMIABLE SENATE PRESIDENT ANTONIO FONTAN, WHO PROVIDED THE SENATOR WITH A BRIEF RUNDOWN ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT AND THE POLITICAL SITUATION GENERALLY AND THEN SHOWED HIM THROUGH THE SENATE BUILDING.

5. DURING THE BRIEF CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA ON MARCH 28, OREJA MADE NO MENTION OF THE PREVIOUS DAY'S SNUB, BUT SPOKE BRIEFLY ABOUT SPANISH FOREIGN POLICY. ON THE SUBJECT OF GIBRALTAR, HE POINTED TO THE PRECEDENT ESTABLISHED BY THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES OF SETTING DOWN AN EXPLICIT DATE, ALBEIT FAR IN THE FUTURE, FOR THE TURNOVER OF THE CANAL TO PANAMA, VIEWING THIS AS A DESIRABLE APPROACH TO THE GIBRALTAR QUESTION. HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT US SHIP VISITS TO GIBRALTAR, UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS, CONTINUED TO PRESENT PROBLEMS TO THE GOS.

6. THE AMBASSADOR THEN GAVE A LUNCH AT THE RESIDENCE
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FOR THE SENATOR WHERE HE WAS ABLE TO MEET 15 POLITICAL AND GOVT FIGURES, INCLUDING FONTAN, JIMENEZ BLANCO, CAMUNAS AND RUPEREZ (UCD), BOYER, SOLANA (LUIS), AND MARIN (PSOE), FRAGA (AP), TIerno GALVAN (PSP), REDONDO (UGT) AND FERRER (CEOE). THE LUNCHEON PROVIDED THE SENATOR AND HIS INTERLOCUTORS WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE IMPRESSIONS ON A WIDE VARIETY OF SUBJECTS, AND THE SENATOR OFFERED A TOAST COMPLIMENTING THE SPANISH ON THEIR SUCCESS IN BRINGING DEMOCRACY TO THE COUNTRY AND REAFFIRMING OUR SUPPORT FOR A DEMOCRATIC SPAIN.

7. THE SENATOR WENT DIRECTLY FROM THE LUNCHEON TO CALL ON KING JUAN CARLOS WHO HAD BEEN FULLY BRIEFED BY THE AMBASSADOR ON THE PROBLEMS WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER. THE KING APOLOGIZED TO THE SENATOR FOR THE PREVIOUS DAY'S SNAFU AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, AND WAS PARTICULARLY WARM AND SOLICITOUS. ALTHOUGH A RELATIVELY BRIEF EXCHANGE, THE CALL ON THE KING WAS A RELAXED AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION TO THE SENATOR'S BRIEF STAY IN MADRID. SOON THEREAFTER, SENATOR AND MRS. CHURCH AND MR. NORDLICHT DEPARTED MADRID FOR A BRIEF STAY ON THE "COSTA DEL SOL" BEFORE BEGINNING THEIR RETURN TRIP TO THE U.S.

8. COMMENT: IN SPITE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S "ERROR OF JUDGMENT," I CONSIDER SENATOR CHURCH'S VISIT TO SPAIN TO HAVE BEEN USEFUL, BOTH IN DEMONSTRATING U.S. SUPPORT FOR SPANISH DEMOCRACY AND IN BROADENING THE SENATOR'S OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPANISH POLITICAL SCENE. THE SENATOR'S REMARKS TO THE PRESS IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY, ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT DISTORTED BY SOME PAPERS, HAVE MADE NO STIR, EXCEPT IN OREJA'S MIND, AND THEN

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ONLY BRIEFLY. WHILE WE WERE PREPARED FOR SOME SENSITIVITIES IN MADRID TO BE GRATED BY THE SENATOR'S PRESENCE IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY DURING BASQUE NATIONAL DAY FESTIVITIES, PARTICULARLY SINCE HE DID NOT FIRST COME TO THE CAPITAL TO PAY RESPECTS, THE FOREIGN MINISTER, WHO IS UNDER CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL PRESSURE AS THE RESULT OF OPPOSITION CRITICISM OF THE GOVT'S FOREIGN POLICY, CLEARLY OVERREACTED. STABLER

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